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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION DRUMMING FOR SUPPORT IN REGIONS FOR NOVEMBER 2  
PROTEST

REF: TBILISI 2559

¶1. Summary: The United National Council of ten opposition parties (reftel) has applied for a public demonstration permit with the city of Tbilisi for their November 2 anti-government demonstration. They are actively promoting smaller-scale demonstrations in the regions and recruiting people to attend the November 2 protest in the capital. The Council's preparations are meeting with mixed success so far. End summary.

¶2. Representatives of the ten opposition parties, which call themselves the United National Council, started a regional tour on October 23. The purpose of the tour is to mobilize citizens in the regions to attend the opposition "Big Rally" scheduled for November 2 in Tbilisi. The tour itinerary was announced on TV and published in the press.

¶3. On October 23, the opposition leaders visited towns of Chokhatauri and Ozurgeti, in Guria region and Batumi, Ajara. Published reports said "several thousand" attended these events, and Republican MP David Berdzenishvili estimated the first crowd at 2,500 people and said around 7,000 people attended the Batumi rally. The main slogan of the rally in Batumi was "Georgia without the President, Ajara without Varshalomidze!" This slogan recalls the Rose Revolution when citizens rallied behind the call for "Georgia without Shevardnadze, Ajara without Abashidze!" Reportedly, supporters of Aslan Abashidze, former head of the local government of Autonomous Republic of Ajara who was ousted in 2003, joined the rally.

¶4. On October 24, opposition leaders visited the seaport of Poti. The meeting in Poti proved unsuccessful, as people did not gather in the city center. After driving around for some time with horns and loudspeakers, the opposition left for Samtredia and Zugdidi where they found more supporters. Berdzenishvili said some 600 supporters attended in Samtredia. Of the National Council, only Konstantine Gamsakhurdia spoke in his home region of Zugdidi. On the same day, the leaders returned to Tbilisi to hold meetings with representatives of medical doctors and NGOs.

¶5. The rallying cry of the meetings is "I Am Not Afraid." The Council is calling for people to "stand up" against Saakashvili's "repressive regime." Their main demand is to hold preterm Parliamentary elections in April, 2008.

¶6. Concurrently, the opposition is preparing for the November 2 rally, and has already filed a request for permission with the Tbilisi municipality. Council leader Koba Davitashvili (Party of the People) said in a briefing that the Council expects about 100,000 people to attend in front of Parliament on Rustaveli Avenue. This is the high end of expectations, and no one is able to accurately predict what attendance will be. Berdzenishvili said "we can bring as many people from the regions as we want; the only hindrance is money to pay for transportation." The mayor's office formally has 10 days to consider the request for the rally, though

the decision is expected to be known in two or three days.  
Rejection of the request, or offering a different venue, will  
increase the opposition's resentment of the government.

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